

# Business getting the most from research

November 10 2010

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Management and business performance, rather than technological innovation, is the main focus for companies collaborating with universities, according to major survey of businesses conducted by the Centre for Business Research at the University of Cambridge and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The survey shows that collaborations are primarily based on problem solving, people- or community-based interactions rather than technology transfer.

While policy and research traditionally have focused on universities' contributions to technology transfer - such as patents, licences and spin-outs - the findings show that the impact from knowledge exchange is much more wide-ranging. [Survey](#) data revealed that business motivations to enter into partnerships with researchers include service development, human resource management, training and marketing.

"Our findings show that [technology transfer](#) is important, but this presents an incomplete representation of the wide process of knowledge exchange that takes place between academics from all disciplines with partners in the private, public and third sector including charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises," researcher Michael Kitson points out.

"We believe it is also necessary to focus on the more diverse and varied impacts of business-university knowledge exchange relations. These include a range of people-based, problem-solving and community-orientated activities. The importance of diversity is also apparent. We found that different universities have different strengths and impacts on

local and regional development," he adds.

The survey is part of a research project examining business-university knowledge exchange partnerships, their effectiveness and regional impact. As well as the business survey, which generated over 2,500 responses, the research included an academic survey with over 22,000 responses and several case studies. The survey of academics shows that the knowledge exchange activities had significant positive impacts on research and teaching.

Knowledge exchange collaborations were not concentrated in specific UK areas, but evenly distributed across the country. For companies entering a partnership there is frequently a trade-off between choosing nearby research centres and personal contact, or institutions further away offering more specialised expertise.

Barriers to collaborations were also identified in the research. Major business constraints were lack of resources, lack of supporting policy programmes to encourage interactions, difficulty in identifying partners and insufficient benefits. However, cultural barriers between business and academia or problems with intellectual property were not seen as major problems. Academics identified a similar pattern of constraints, the most important being lack of time, bureaucracy and insufficient rewards.

"Although the evidence from our survey shows that academics are engaged in a wide range of knowledge exchange activities, it also suggests some areas for caution," Mr Kitson says. "Major constraints include a lack of time and resources to initiate and manage interactions. What is needed are more boundary spanning individuals and organisations that can help connect academia with the [business](#) and public sectors. The recently announced initiative by the Government to build technology and innovation centres should help to enhance this

connectivity and improve economic growth in the future."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

Citation: Business getting the most from research (2010, November 10) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-business.html>

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